



200 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

PREKINDERGARTEN

Fact Sheet
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What are prekindergarten programs?

Prekindergarten is a state-funded prekindergarten program for four-year-old children who are potentially at-risk of failing in school. The overall goal of prekindergarten is to provide learning experiences to help children develop and maintain the basic skills necessary for successful school performance. The program's goal is being achieved by providing appropriate experiences that address the literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of young children. Maryland currently has prekindergarten classrooms in 296 or 36% of all elementary schools.

Who operates prekindergarten programs?

Local school systems are required to develop local policies and procedures for implementing prekindergarten programs that are in accordance with state regulations. Under these regulations, a prekindergarten site typically operates one morning and one afternoon session five days a week for a minimum of 2.5 hours daily per session consistent with the local school system calendar. Each classroom session has an average of 20 students and is staffed with one state-certified early childhood teacher and a qualified full time assistant. Many local school systems use the MSDE prekindergarten quality standards which define program management, the quality of early education in the classroom, staff development, and procedures for communication with kindergarten and first grade teachers as well as public/private partnership with child care programs.

Who is eligible for prekindergarten?

Eligibility for enrollment is extended to four-year-old children who come from families with economically disadvantaged backgrounds or who are homeless. After the initial enrollment of these children, local school systems may fill any remaining vacancies by enrolling children who exhibit a lack of readiness in personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies, the arts, or physical development and health.

What are the long-term effects of prekindergarten?

The results of an analysis on the long-term effects of the Maryland prekindergarten programs indicate that enrollment in the program has a positive effect on the participants' school performance through elementary and middle school. The findings also suggest that participation in prekindergarten programs significantly reduces the number of children who were identified as having disabilities or placement in special education.

How is prekindergarten funded?

The state legislature approves the funding for the prekindergarten programs. Local school systems may combine prekindergarten, Title I and Compensatory Education funds to operate the prekindergarten programs. In addition, some prekindergarten programs are funded by local school systems. In 2007-08, prekindergarten funds will become part of the state aid formula.

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How does the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act impact prekindergarten?

The Bridge to Excellence Act in Public Schools requires that by “the 2007-08 school year, all eligible children shall be admitted free of charge to publicly funded prekindergarten programs established by each of the county boards.” It further states that local school systems, in the comprehensive master plans, “shall identify strategies that will be used in that county to ensure that publicly funded prekindergarten programs are available to all eligible children in that county by the 2007-08 school year.”

In 2003-2004, following the requirements of the Bridge to Excellence Act, local school systems identified eligibility in terms of a four-year-old child’s economically disadvantaged background or homeless status. Eligibility in terms of any other school readiness needs applies only in the case of remaining vacancies according to local school system policies. Final adoption of the new prekindergarten program regulations is expected in February 2004.